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UNCLAS ADDIS ABABA 000606

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STATE FOR AF/E, USAID FOR AFR AA EGAST, AFR/EA CTHOMPSON,  
AND DCHA FOR DDIKERNAN AND JBORNS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: SOMALI REGIONAL PRESIDENT DISCUSSES  
HUMANITARIAN ACCESS WITH U.S. AND UN DELEGATION

Summary

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11. (SBU) Newly-appointed Somali Regional President Dawood Mohammed told the Ambassador and delegation that Ethiopia's Somali region wants U.S. and international support for long-term development, especially in exploiting water resources. Security is still a major issue in the Somali region, Dawood said, but added that most zones in the region are peaceful and his administration would like to see more donor support for peaceful but underdeveloped areas. For emergency relief work, Dawood and his cabinet acknowledged donor and non-governmental organization (NGO) concerns that there is still no consistent mechanism to ensure access to contested areas. Dawood pledged to chair monthly meetings, beginning on March 26, of all stakeholders -- NGOs, international organizations, the regional government and donors -- to begin a dialogue to resolve the many outstanding issues, particularly regarding access. Dawood indicated his administration would seek to vet local staff employed by NGOs. Somali regional state cabinet members expressed great mistrust of NGOs and their activities, while at the same time underscoring the region's need for international assistance. End Summary.

12. (U) Somali Regional President Dawood Mohammed met for several hours with the Ambassador, UN Coordinator and delegation in Jijiga on March 5. Dawood was accompanied by Head of Regional Security Abdi Mohamed Umar (a.k.a Abdi Illi), Head of the Bureau of Finance and Economic Development (BoFED) Umar Haji, Somali People's Democratic Party (SPDP) General Secretary Abdu Fatah and the following Somali regional cabinet members: Head of the Health Bureau Ahmed Mohamed, Head of Agricultural Bureau Ahmed Mohammed, Secretary to the Regional President Guled Abdullahi, Head of the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Bureau (DPPB) Guled Ali, and the Head of the Education Bureau. The USAID Mission Director, USAID Senior Policy Advisor, RSO and PolOff also participated, along with representatives from the United Nations Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), Save the Children-UK and Mercy Corps. Separately, the Ambassador and UN Coordinator and delegation also met with NGO implementing partners.

Somali Region Open for Development Assistance

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13. (SBU) "We want to work with all donors, aid agencies and non-governmental organizations," Dawood told the Ambassador. "Over the past year the Somali region experienced a severe drought and tense politics - and the donors helped save people - but we need long term development," Dawood said, emphasizing that "we are behind other regions developmentally but we have the capacity to develop now." Dawood noted that the Prime Minister has directed the federal government to give "special attention" to Somali region and that more than 2,000 officials have been deployed in support of that objective, including a federal advisor to each woreda. Although capacity-building projects have begun, Dawood said, "we lack the capacity to develop by ourselves because we don't have the skilled manpower or (other) institutional capabilities." Dawood added that "food aid saves lives, but now we are thinking of the future. We are committed to investing our budget in (long-term) development." SPDP Head Abdu emphasized that the Ethiopian government has undergone a "paradigm shift: we want to develop long-term, although we will not exclude quick fixes (for pressing problems). We have gone from 'defensive' to 'receptive' and there is now a conducive environment for development in the Somali region." As for emergency relief, Dawood acknowledged "we have problems with implementation. Our DPPB office cannot manage monitoring and evaluation. Training would help." (Note: Dawood surprisingly did not realize that most food aid through the World Food Program (WFP) and larger NGO projects was U.S. assistance. End Note.)

#### Pledge to Coordinate with NGOs on Access

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14. (SBU) For emergency relief work, Dawood and his cabinet acknowledged donor and NGO concerns that there is still no consistent mechanism to ensure access to contested areas. Dawood pledged to convene monthly meetings, with the first to be chaired by himself on March 26, of all stakeholders -- NGOs, international organizations, the regional government and donors -- to begin a dialogue to resolve the many outstanding issues. Dawood also pledged to support technical-level coordination meetings between his government and NGOs on as often a basis as necessary. Dawood noted that one item on the agenda on March 26 would be the Somali regional state's need to "scrutinize" lists of local employees of NGOs operating in the Somali region, explaining that "development assistance is meant for the most vulnerable, not for anti-peace elements. Some local staff looted our budget but landed with NGOs. Some have been involved in (terrorist) bombings. You don't know the anti-peace elements as we do. Some are ex-Siad Barre generals."

#### Mistrust and Mixed Messages on NGOs

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15. (SBU) Cabinet members criticized NGOs whom they believe undermine state authority. SPDP Head Abdu remarked, "the region's security situation has always been politicized. Some NGOs align with our objectives, some cross lines." Health Bureau Head Ahmed said, "some NGOs are problematic. Their security reports are erroneous, and they enter into politics and insurgent activities. There is a clash between access and breaching rules. Paradoxically, the safest areas get the least development assistance. NGOs are not interested in developing the peaceful areas where the majority of the population lives. Security issues are not the mandate of most NGOs. If a security issue arises, the government has a responsibility to deny access temporarily to ensure safety. We want NGOs to be neutral; if they can't be, why should we let them in? We don't want NGOs involved in political issues." Security Head Abdi added that "we need your support, but anti-peace elements disturb our development agenda and steal food rations." SPDP General Secretary Abdu stressed his view that some NGO staff are biased in favor of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and that, while the Ethiopian government welcomes NGO contributions, "some

NGOs really are doing negative activities." Moreover, Abdi contended, "some people the regional government has fired have been hired by NGOs: they will hire you so long as you are anti-government. Some NGO staffs don't follow their mission statements. Some work in (contested areas) to hide their activities." Abdi divided NGOs into "good" and "bad" and said "we need support from good NGOs, but many NGOs exaggerate for marketing purposes - they describe the Somali region like Darfur, otherwise they would lose business." Abdi added that "(Many) NGOs are terrible in our region. You can't see what they do. They just write reports and spend their budgets."

#### The Security Problem

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¶6. (SBU) "Development and security cannot be separated, and our problem is security," Dawood underscored. While careful to state that most of the Somali region is peaceful, Dawood said that in Degahabur and Denan "the insurgents are killing people, (and) elders I have spoken to have told me they are afraid." Security Head Abdi asserted that the ONLF is a terrorist organization, not a nationalist insurgency, and that the ONLF has a "relationship" with al Shabab. SPDP General Secretary Abdu contended that "the majority of ONLF are Al Ithad Al Islami (AIAI) or al-Shabaab. Some are even American citizens. (Still), our top officials and the Somali region people are together 100 percent. The people themselves are fighting the ONLF." Abdi criticized the U.S. State Department's 2009 Human Rights Report as too partial to the ONLF and denied that Ethiopian state security has killed anyone in the Somali region. Abdi said that if state security members are caught stealing food rations, they are

prosecuted. "I am elected," he spoke rhetorically, "so why would I stand between the people?" Abdu said accusations against the Ethiopian National Defense Force's (ENDF) alleged actions only take root because "ONLF propaganda is very fast." Abdu nonetheless expressed the "hope (that) we will soon abolish the ONLF once and for all, whether the U.S. supports us or not."

#### The Priority is Water

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¶7. (SBU) President Dawood and his cabinet members emphasized that their first priority is to develop the region's water resources, which may include significant underground aquifers that can be exploited for irrigation. Dawood said his administration has established two related steering committees for land use and ground water management. Many Somali region communities failed to take advantage of their proximity to groundwater, Dawood added, which, he said, is equivalent to being "married to a woman, but you can't see her." German Agro-Action will dig 100 boreholes in the region, Dawood said. Another official said that the government is looking at three "development corridors": rivers, aquifers and pastoral. Livestock is a second priority.

#### Somali Region to Align with Federal Development Goals

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¶8. (SBU) Dawood said the Somali region would more closely align its development objectives with those of the federal government. Toward that end, Dawood said the Somali regional government has signed an agreement with the federal government to take advantage of the Somali region's comparative advantages, such as its abundant livestock (although Dawood acknowledged productivity in all sectors must be "scaled up" to maximize the benefits of inter-region trade). Cabinet members also noted that the federal government intends to encourage Somali region residents to forgo nomadic lifestyles in favor of agriculture and business. Cabinet members stressed the Somali regional government wants technical support for its five year development plan, so long as it is "constructive and politically neutral support."

## Improved Conditions, Waiting for Rain

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¶9. (SBU) DPPB Head Guled remarked that conditions for livestock and other indicators have improved over the past few months, while malnutrition has decreased. Recent improvements in implementation of the "hub and spoke" system for food distribution have been particularly beneficial. Although March is dry season for Somali region, rains have been better and people who had crowded into towns to find food during last years' drought largely have returned to their villages, Guled noted. Health Bureau Head Ahmed noted that mobile health clinics supported by donors have performed well and that, despite an epidemic of rabies among wild foxes and a smattering of meningitis cases, the Somali region has had no major outbreaks of communicable diseases in recent months.

Comment

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¶10. (SBU) Dawood's pledge to host a meeting between his administration, NGOs, international organizations and donors to discuss NGO work in Somali region and access to contested areas could be a positive first step in clearing up misunderstandings between the government and NGOs and in establishing mechanisms for enhanced communication and cooperation. Mistrust of NGOs runs deep within the cabinet, however, and follow-through will be important. In response to the opportunity evident in the meeting, USAID has established a special Somali Region Task Force with participation by all sectors and OFDA. USAID will host a pre-meeting with the UN agencies and relevant NGOs next week.

Also, agreements with the regional government are not always respected by the ENDF. As the largest donor to the Somali region (via World Food Program and implementing partners), the U.S. will have a leading role in the March 26 meeting.  
End Comment.  
YAMAMOTO